

Buddhist and Yogic Dialogues on Inner Ecology: Comparative Insights for Education and Governance in The Global South

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Abstract

This study explores the converging ethical and ecological dimensions of Buddhist and Yogic traditions to propose a culturally grounded model of “inner ecology” for the Global South. The study looks at how spiritual ideas from India and Cambodia could help with education, leadership, and long-term growth in light of the global climate disaster and the failure of technocratic governing systems. The research looks at well-known texts like the Dhammapada and Yoga Sūtras, as well as changes to the education system, such as India's National Education Policy 2020 and Cambodia's peace education programs. It does this by looking at policies in a qualitative way and comparing them to philosophical ideas. The results demonstrate that activities that encourage reflection, like meditation, following moral norms, and practicing yoga self-discipline, can help people become more aware of their surroundings, accept responsibility for their actions, and manage their feelings. The study also shows how using Dharma and yogic ideas to run a government can promote compassion, self-control, and interdependence. The study reveals that inner ecology is not simply a notion; it is a useful, decolonial framework that can bring together environmental justice, public ethics, and policy improvements that are in accordance with the SDGs in areas where Buddhism is the majority religion. It finishes by saying that moral and spiritual education should be made a part of the school system, that the government should undertake ethical audits, and that different areas should study spiritual ecologies.

Keywords: Cambodia, India, inner ecology, Buddhist ethics, yogic philosophy, spiritual ecology, education policy

I. Introduction

The global ecological disaster has reached a critical stage, and there are urgent calls for changes in how to govern and what to think is right and wrong. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022) argues that the globe is coming closer to tipping points that would permanently disrupt biodiversity, climate systems, and social cohesion. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP, 2022) states that models that are largely technocratic and policy-driven don't consider the moral and behavioral dimensions of climate change. This is why UNEP wants to see moral guidelines integrated in environmental management. Researchers and practitioners have started to talk about the idea of "inner ecology" in response to these calls. This idea derives from contemplative traditions, ecological ethics, and holistic education. Macy (1996) believes that inner ecology is the growth of inner awareness, compassion, and mindfulness that sustains the equilibrium of the outside world. Zajonc (2013) makes a similar point stating that making the world a better place, starting by changing oneself, learning to control your thoughts and feelings, and maturing as a person. This new approach of talking about things combines

ideas from spiritual philosophy and environmental science. It goes against the prevalent notions that say that damage to the environment has little to do with people's and communities' inner existence.

Buddhist and yogic beliefs provide solutions to deal with this new style of thinking that are based on history and are congruent with our culture. Ahimsa (not hurting), Sīla/Yamas (ethical restraint), and Paṭiccasamuppāda (interdependence) are all essential moral themes in both religions. Hanh (2013), Aurobindo and Ghose (2000) and other scholars claim that becoming more attentive, detached, and compassionate makes a better person and instills greater responsibility for the world. These teachings have contemporary relevance for transforming educational practices, civic ethics, and governance cultures in societies grappling with both ecological collapse and value erosion. Nowhere is this synthesis more relevant than in the historically linked civilizational contexts of India and Cambodia. As Coedès (1968) and Chandler (2018) indicate that both countries have a long history of mixing politics and religion. For instance, the Dharmarāja royal paradigm in Cambodia and the Rajayogi ascetic-

political ideal in Indian texts. These traditions made moral cosmologies a part of how governments worked. This shows that people used to think that being a leader was more than just administering things; it was also considered as spiritually transformative and morally accountable. Bringing these indigenous models back to life can provide us valuable ideas for government systems that are still mostly secular but don't have a lot of moral depth. People all throughout the world know about the climate problem, but the Global South's main systems of government and education still adopt Western-centric, technocratic models that don't have any moral or cultural depth. Researchers like Shiva (2005) claim that these practices are founded on modernist thinking and separate communities from their spiritual, ecological, and cultural roots. They claim that the loss of respect for indigenous knowledge systems, such Buddhist and Yogic moral frameworks, has led to a drop in civic ethics, community resilience, and concern for the environment. Also, regular schools in India and Cambodia have usually focused more on acquiring facts than on managing emotions, asking moral questions, and learning about spirituality. People are less able to consider morally and

care for the environment because of this, especially young people (UNESCO, 2020). It is much harder because formal education and leadership training rarely integrate Dharma-based ethics or Buddhist meditation practices in their discussions of policy. It is needed to look at civic education, environmental education, and governance frameworks afresh with inner ecology in mind. This will bring back native ways of thinking that can help individuals stick to long-term peacebuilding and sustainability.

This research aims to examine how Buddhist and Yogic traditions articulate a coherent vision of inner ecology and how this vision can inform education and governance systems in India and Cambodia. The objectives of the study are threefold: (1) to explore the philosophical foundations of inner ecology as understood through Buddhist and Yogic ethics, (2) to analyse how these frameworks are operationalized in education and governance policies, with special attention to contemporary reforms in both India and Cambodia, and (3) to propose a culturally grounded, ethics-based model for regenerative development, civic engagement, and sustainable governance in the Global South. By foregrounding these objectives, the

study seeks to bridge spiritual philosophy and political praxis, offering a pathway to environmental consciousness that is rooted in indigenous wisdom and relevant to contemporary crises. As is clear, contributes to an emerging interdisciplinary dialogue that brings together religious philosophy, political theory, and comparative education to address urgent global challenges. It talks about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a direct way. For example, SDG 4.7 says that education should promote human rights, global citizenship, and respect for cultural diversity. SDG 13 says that it is crucial to act right away to fight climate change through adaptation and awareness. SDG 16 says that societies should be peaceful and open to everyone, and that institutions should be held accountable. The study also helps to decolonize the global conversation about sustainability by integrating spiritual-based moral systems from cultures outside of the West. Kothari et al. (2019) suggest that the Global South needs to transform its ecology for real, and that this change needs to originate from worldviews that are founded on the local community and ethics, not from imported technocratic scripts.

In general, this study gives us useful information for modifying how to teach ethical leadership, how to make climate policy that respects both the past and the present, and how to change education policy. This means that India and Cambodia are not just following global climate plans, but they are also coming up with new ideas and ways of thinking about sustainability.

II. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Inner Ecology: Definition and Disciplinary Roots

Inner ecology is a novel philosophy that combines meditative science, environmental ethics, and education that changes people. Zajonc (2013) says that inner ecology is how our thoughts, feelings, objectives, and ideals fit in with the outside world of social networks and ecosystems. In this frame of thinking, environmental sustainability isn't merely the outcome of new legislation; it is also an indication of moral consciousness and psychospiritual integration. Joanna Macy (1996), a pioneer in deep ecology and Buddhist systems theory, thinks that curing the ecological collapse unless requires changing who humans are, what they want, how they think, and how far away from

nature spiritually. Macy thinks that the environmental problem is essentially a crisis of perception. This is because humans are cut off from the web of life, which Buddhist teachings call *Paṭiccasamuppāda* (*dependent origination*). Schumacher makes the same idea in his key book *Small Is Beautiful* (1973): economics, governance, and education must be based on inner values and spiritual knowledge. This means that the search for human well-being is both moral and ecological. These thinkers together lay the framework for perceiving inner ecology as a reflection of exterior sustainability, which is a highly important principle in both Buddhist and Yogic traditions.

2.2 The Buddhist Way of Life and Government

Buddhist ethics theory gives us a highly precise technique to make our inner ecosystem better by practicing alone and with others. Some of the main ideas that guide moral education, responsible government, and relational awareness are *Paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination), *Sīla* (ethical discipline), and *Karuṇā* (compassion). According to Harvey (2000), these traits represent the moral basis of Buddhist philosophy. They say that for

society to be peaceful and for the environment to be healthy, people must not hurt each other, be dependent on each other, and have good intents. These moral rules weren't just for monks or individuals in the past. They were also part of Buddhist ideas about kingship and administration. Dharma (moral code) was a part of administration, public works, and civic education during Jayavarman VII's leadership in 12th-century Angkor. This is a good illustration of this blend. Chandler (2018) and Harris (2005) believe that Jayavarman employed compassion as a political virtue by following Buddhist teachings to create hospitals, rest houses, and irrigation systems.

In current times, Buddhist ethics have come back into play in fields like peace education, mindfulness-based governance, and ethical leadership. As highlighted in *Peace via Peaceful Means: A Buddhist Perspective on Restorative Justice*, civic programs based on Buddhism incorporate fundamental themes including healing, community involvement, setting things right, and taking responsibility. These principles are completely distinct from punishments and are very comparable to the goals of SDG 16, which are peace, justice,

and society that include everyone (Vu et al., 2024).

2.3 Yogic Philosophy and Ecological Awareness

Yogic philosophy, like Buddhism, gives us a diverse but connected set of moral and cosmological principles for our inner world. The Yamas and Niyamas are the primary guidelines for living a good life and keeping yourself in check. They are written down in Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras. Feuerstein (2003) states that these precepts, including Ahimsa (non-violence), Aparigraha (non-possessiveness), Saucha (purity), and Santosha (contentment), are closely related to sustainable lives since they encourage living simply, finding inner peace, and living in harmony with nature. This links yogic moral ideas like Ahimsa, Aparigraha, Saucha, and Santosha to living simply, taking care of the environment, and being aware of what to do (Vikasa, 2024, December 13). Yogic ideas on karma (the idea that acts have moral consequences) and non-attachment (Vairāgya) help people become more aware of the environment by underlining the long-term effects of actions based on desire and the spiritual duty to decrease suffering for all beings. Saraswati and Saraswati (2002) say

that the yogic worldview sees people as part of a larger cosmological order. In this system, taking care of the environment and maintaining self-control are two sides of the same coin.

Yogic cosmology is also part of holistic education, which teaches the body, mind, and spirit all at the same time. The National Education Policy (NEP), of India, which was released in 2020, says that yoga is important for teaching values, learning by experience, and developing character. Bazzano et al. (2023) argue that yoga-based education fosters inner stability, ethical judgment, and ecological mindfulness, making it an asset in both formal schooling and civic training. Supporting this view, Chauhan and Saxena (2024) demonstrate that school-based yoga programs enhance student well-being, self-awareness, and ecological consciousness, key elements of sustainable and value-driven education. A 2015 study from Penn State University (2015) found that bringing yoga to classrooms also lowers mental discomfort and makes students more focused and engaged. This shows how yoga can help young people become more aware of right and wrong and stronger emotionally.

2.4 Getting Rid of Colonialism in Sustainability and Postcolonial Ethics

Careful consideration is needed on how Buddhist and Yogic ideas could be applied to make the world a better place in a way that is fair and just. Shiva (2005) and other researchers say that conventional environmental theories are based on Eurocentric reasoning that takes solutions out of context, makes them universal, and secularizes them. This isolates sustainability from culture, spirit, and geography. Postcolonial thinkers suggest that Indian and Cambodian traditions shouldn't be thought of as folk wisdom or symbolic heritage. Instead, they should be understood as living methods of knowing that can lead to new ways of teaching, leading, and taking care of the environment. Kothari et al. (2019) talk about

a "pluriverse" of knowledge and say that indigenous ontologies and pedagogies should come back in the face of uniform development. Kapoor (2008) agrees with this point of view, noting that sustainability without moral decolonization makes cognitive imperialism stronger and pushes voices from the Global South to the fringes. In this light, Buddhist and Yogic contributions to inner ecology are not just moral add-ons but epistemological interventions that challenge the materialist and managerial logic of mainstream governance and education. They call for a re-localization of ethics and a re-spiritualization of sustainability, positioning culture and consciousness as the foundations for both civic life and environmental policy as documented in table 1.

Table 1: Theoretical Framework—Inner Ecology and Its Philosophical Roots

Size	Main Points	Using it for study
Inner Ecology	Bringing your mental awareness and moral views in line with your sustainability aims; making changes to yourself as an ecological action	It lays the mental and spiritual groundwork for linking education and government to sustainability.
Buddhist Ethics and Government	Paṭiccasamuppāda (interdependence), Sīla (ethical discipline), and Karuṇā	Shows how Buddhist values could affect civic obligation,

Size	Main Points	Using it for study
	(compassion) are all parts of the Dharmarāja method.	state morality, and peace education.
Yoga and the Environment	Yamas and Niyamas, karma, not being attached, and yoga-based education that looks at the whole person	Talks on how yoga can help people learn ideals (such NEP 2020) and become more aware of their surroundings.
Post-colonization, ethics and making sustainability	Criticism of secular notions from the West; epistemic pluralism; indigenous moral systems as real knowledge	Reframes Buddhist and yogic principles as living, decolonized means to operate schools and governments in a moral way.

III. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study looked at the idea of "*inner ecology*" and how it is employed in schools and government in India and Cambodia using both comparative philosophical analysis and qualitative policy research. The research design was chosen to critically examine ethical and spiritual traditions within two interconnected civilizational contexts and to analyse how these frameworks inform contemporary policy discourses related to environmental responsibility and civic transformation. The philosophical component involved an in-depth hermeneutic and ethical interpretation of classical Buddhist and Yogic texts, while the

qualitative policy dimension entailed a cross-national comparative review of state-level initiatives in both countries. This two-pronged approach made it feasible to fully reconcile metaphysical insights with institutional realities. This helped to establish a grounded but theoretically rich knowledge of inner ecology as both a normative vision and a policy-relevant framework.

3.2 Data Collection

Three significant sources of data were classical literature, policy papers, and field-level programs that incorporated spiritual ecological practices. The first step was to look at significant religious texts and uncover moral concepts, metaphors, and teaching methods that have to do with inner ecology.

We read that the Buddhist scriptures, especially the Dhammapada, Sutta Nipāta, and Mahāyāna Śūtras, to learn about how to be kind (Karuṇā), how to be ethical (Sīla), and how to depend on others (Paṭiccasamuppāda). Parallel analysis was performed on Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*, focusing on the Yamas and Niyamas, as well as commentarial works such as those by Swami Vivekananda and Swami Sivananda, to understand the relationship between personal discipline and ecological restraint.

Second, the study conducted a document-based review of educational and governance policies. Researchers looked at the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP, 2020) in India to see how it combined value-based and experiential learning, such as by encouraging yoga and environmental ethics. The Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS) of Cambodia consistently include peace education in its long-term objectives. For example, the 2014–2018 Education Strategic Plan lists peace and social harmony as important goals within the scope of civic education (MoEYS, 2014). These documents were examined to assess how well they include spiritual principles, mindfulness

practices, and moral reasoning in formal institutional settings.

Third, the study investigated community-based spiritual ecological projects through published reports, NGO documentation, and grey literature. Initiatives such as Cambodia's monastic forest protection programs and India's eco-spiritual schools (e.g., those affiliated with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Parmarth Niketan) were studied as examples of grassroots applications of inner ecology. These stories show how contemplative traditions can affect how people act in their communities when it comes to civic and environmental issues.

3.3 Sources (Written in Sentences)

To make sure the analysis was thorough and balanced, it used a wide range of canonical, institutional, and developmental sources. The Dhammapada, Sutta Nipāta, and Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali were some of the most important canonical writings, along with several comments that were important to moral and meditative traditions. The study looked at India's National Education Policy 2020 and Cambodia's Peace Education Policy Framework and Education Strategic Plan as examples of national policy papers. Reports from NGOs and international groups were

also reviewed, such as UNESCO's (2020) publications on Education for Sustainable Development, UNEP briefings, and materials from networks like the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) and the Ramakrishna Mission. These many sources were cross-checked to make sure the interpretations were correct, consistent, and showed relevant connections between old philosophical ideas and modern approaches to education and sustainability.

3.4 Justification

This strategy worked especially well for studying moral stories, native philosophies, and how they may be used in education and government. The comparative aspect made it possible to look at things in a way that was sensitive to culture and took into consideration both the shared historical legacies and the different policy changes that have happened in India and Cambodia. The philosophical lens, on the other hand, let the study go beyond descriptive accounts to normative theorization, showing how inner ecology might help people respond to climate and civic crises in a way that is based on their values. Creswell and Poth (2016) say that qualitative research based on constructivist and interpretivist paradigms is especially

good for looking at how people make sense of things, how cultures change, and how moral education grows. This was confirmed throughout the study, as both participants and texts showed that Buddhist and Yogic teachings could be used to solve problems in today's world.

IV. Buddhist and Yogic roots of inner ecology

4.1 Moral Rules and Health of the Environment

Both Buddhist and Yogic traditions are based on the idea that moral self-control is the basis for environmental and civic responsibility. These ethical systems offer a moral architecture that aligns inner transformation with outer sustainability, establishing what this study identifies as the first layer of inner ecology. In Buddhism, the Five Precepts (Pañca Sīla) and the Noble Eightfold Path constitute the basic moral code for lay practitioners and monastics alike. The Five Precepts say that human should not kill, steal, have sex, lie, or take drugs. They educate people how to regulate your actions and think about what other people need. These two things are both vital for living in harmony with the world around you. Harvey (2000) adds that these rules are not only regulations;

they are also techniques to explain how everything is connected (Paṭiccasamuppāda) and how doing harm has karmic implications. The Eightfold Path, especially its parts on Right Action, Right Livelihood, and Right Mindfulness, helps us think about ethics in a more thorough way. Kumar (2017) believes that this method makes a kind of moral ecosystem by concentrating on actions that reduce pain, promote social peace, and minimize material attachment, all of which are necessary for a long-lasting way of life.

In Yogic philosophy, the Yamas and Niyamas in Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras have the same goal. Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truthfulness), Asteya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (moderation), and Aparigraha (non-possessiveness) are all Yamas, which are standards for how to act morally. The Niyamas, or observances, are Saucha (purity), Santosha (contentment), Tapas (discipline), Svādhyāya (self-study), and Īśvarapraṇidhāna (surrender to a higher power). As Feuerstein (2003) and Saraswati and Saraswati (2002) point out, these ethical precepts directly cultivate a lifestyle of restraint, ecological awareness, and intersubjective accountability. For example, *Ahimsa* not only forbids harm to others but

encourages reverence for all sentient beings, forming a direct ethical bridge to contemporary principles of environmental ethics. Aparigraha also combats materialism and hoarding by urging individuals to live modestly and have little impact. In this way, the moral codes of Buddhism and Yoga are connected. They connect ecological integrity to how people act, their civic obligation, and their spiritual insight.

4.2 Meditation Awareness and Environment Perception

Meditative awareness changes how people see themselves and the natural world, which helps keep and deepen their inner ecology. Buddhist and yogic meditation both encourage being aware, asking yourself questions, and not responding. These are all vital for knowing and living interdependently. People learn to see impermanence, suffering, and non-self (anicca, dukkha, anattā) in everything through Buddhist practices, especially Vipassanā (insight meditation). This practice generates direct experiential insight into the interconnectedness of all life forms, thereby fostering what Hanh (2013) calls *interbeing*, a spiritual ecology grounded in mindful awareness of the web of life. As he writes,

“when we touch the Earth mindfully, we touch the past, the future, and the present moment all at once.” Mindfulness (Sati), as taught in both the Pāli Canon and contemporary mindfulness-based interventions (e.g., MBSR), helps regulate compulsive desire, consumerism, and affective reactivity. Kabat-Zinn (2005) emphasizes that mindfulness fosters cognitive-emotional clarity, allowing individuals to make ethical, environmentally sensitive decisions with full awareness.

Yoga uses progressive levels of concentration (Dhāraṇā), withdrawal of senses (Pratyāhāra), and absorption (Samādhi) to help people become more conscious when meditating (Dhyāna). Bazzano et al. (2023) claim that these stages make people more aware and less egocentric, which is a big reason why people do not care about the environment. When a person becomes more aware of himself and includes all of nature in that consciousness, caring for the environment and acting morally become natural parts of that awareness. This attentional training is more than simply a type of treatment; it's also a social and environmental technology that can lessen

greed, anger, and loneliness while increasing empathy and responsible behavior.

4.3 Contemplative Practices as Ecological Technologies

In addition to ethical conduct and meditative awareness, contemplative practices themselves operate as “ecological technologies”, disciplined methods for transforming consciousness and reducing one's ecological footprint. Breathing, silence, retreat, and fasting are not only spiritual exercises but deliberate strategies of simplification, sensory detoxification, and behavioural restraint. Joanna Macy (1996) says that being more conscious of the environment makes us feel more connected to the Earth and more responsible for it. Scharmer (2016) says that contemplative practices can help people move from ego-system awareness, which is focused on their own needs, to eco-system awareness, which some scholars call “*planetary responsibility*,” or caring for and being interdependent with the whole Earth. For example, breathing meditation slows down reactivity and cultivates reverence for life's most basic element, air, promoting gratitude and humility in the face of ecological dependency. Silence, whether in the form of

meditative sitting or ritual observance (e.g., *Mauna*), is a counter-cultural act in an era of hyper-stimulation and consumption, according to Zajonc (2013). It allows people to hear the "*voice of the Earth*" and their own conscience instead of the noise and stress of other people. Surroundings during retreats and alone time is possible, like in the forest monasteries of Cambodia and the yogic *āśramas* of India. These settings emphasize frugality, introspection, and communion with nature, embodying an economy of attention and ethics of presence. Together, these practices allow individuals and communities to cultivate inner stillness as a civic and planetary responsibility, offering low-cost, culturally rooted tools for climate awareness, emotional resilience, and ecological citizenship.

V. Education as a Platform for Inner Ecological Values

5.1 Cambodia: Peace Education, Buddhist Ethics, and Community Schools

Rural community schools and monastic education institutes are two of Cambodia's most visible sites where Buddhist principles are put into practice in schools. According to Manning (2017), the adjustments made to Cambodian schools after the conflict were

intended to help people heal by reinforcing Buddhist concepts such as karma, compassion, and being present. Community-based initiatives, particularly those supported by Buddhist temples, have incorporated basic meditation practices, storytelling from the Jataka tales, and teachings on *sīla* (ethical conduct) as part of moral education. Brickell and Springer (2017) assert that these grassroots educational spaces function as sites of ethical restoration and civic empowerment in post-genocide Cambodia. However, despite these promising developments, formal national curriculum frameworks often struggle to integrate spiritual ethics in a systematic and secular manner. Brehm and Aktas (2020) highlight policy challenges such as the perceived tension between religious instruction and state secularism, limited teacher training in Buddhist pedagogy, and a lack of instructional materials adapted to contemporary classroom settings. These challenges complicate efforts to fully embed inner ecological values in national education policy.

5.2 India: Yoga in NEP 2020 and Environmental Consciousness

India's National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) provides a significant shift toward a holistic model of education that includes value-based, experiential, and contemplative learning. As Sharma et al. (2023) say that the NEP shows how important yoga, moral thinking, and being conscious of the environment are for making the country better and building character. The Ministry of Education (2020) says that the *Yamas* and *Niyamas* are moral rules from yoga that can help students make choices that are good for them and the world. These principles are implemented through school yoga programs,

mindfulness sessions, and thematic modules on sustainability. Teacher education has also seen increased emphasis on spiritual literacy and environmental responsibility. Sharma and Sayed (2024) argue that India's teacher training reforms now encourage pedagogical integration of yoga with themes of climate change, compassion, and ecological stewardship. Institutions such as the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga and state-level Yoga Education Boards are actively involved in curriculum development and educator capacity building as highlighted in table 2.

Table 2: Educational Integration of Inner Ecological Values in Cambodia and India

Country	Educational Approach	Ethical Framework	Implementation
Cambodia	Community schools, monastic education, peace education	Buddhist ethics (karma, mindfulness, compassion)	Challenges: limited teacher training, policy-secular tension. Strengths: community ownership, post-conflict healing.
India	NEP 2020-driven holistic education, yoga programs	Yogic philosophy (Yamas, Niyamas, karma)	Strengths: policy integration, structured training. Challenges: variation in implementation across states.

5.3 Comparative Insights

A comparative analysis of India and Cambodia reveals convergent and divergent trends in the incorporation of inner ecological

values into education. Cambodia's approach leans toward community-led moral instruction rooted in Buddhist ethics and trauma healing, while India's strategy is

institutionalized and policy-driven, emphasizing structured yoga education and holistic wellness. Both nations share a foundational emphasis on inner transformation and ethical consciousness, but differ in their levels of policy integration, curriculum formalization, and institutional support. Manzon and Lee (2023) note that Asian education systems have deep religious and spiritual foundations, stemming from Buddhist, Confucian, Hindu, and other traditions, that uniquely shape regional approaches to sustainability and ethical formation. They argue these educational

visions diverge significantly from Western models due to distinct postcolonial trajectories and state–religion relationships. While Cambodia relies on monastic networks and cultural heritage to promote ethical awareness, India leverages state-backed reforms to institutionalize yogic and environmental education. Nonetheless, both models highlight the potential of inner ecology to serve as an ethical compass in civic education and sustainable development across the Global South as shown in table 3 for the following comparison.

Table 3: Comparative Ethical Chart: Buddhist and Yogic Foundations of Inner Ecology

Concept	Buddhism (Cambodia)	Yoga (India)
Core Ethics	Five Precepts, Eightfold Path	Yamas and Niyamas
Core Practice	Mindfulness meditation (<i>Vipassanā</i>)	<i>Asana</i> , <i>Pranayama</i> , <i>Dhyāna</i>
Environmental Link	Interdependence, Compassion	Non-attachment, <i>Ahimsa</i> (Non-violence)
Governance Model	<i>Dharmarāja</i> (Righteous King)	<i>Rājayogi</i> (Detached, Ruler)

VI. Governance and Public Ethics in the Light of Inner Ecology

6.1 Dharma-Based Leadership Models

According to Tambiah (1998), Buddhist governance traditions conceptualized kingship not merely as a political function but as a moral and spiritual responsibility

grounded in Dharma. The concept of the *Dharmarāja*, or righteous ruler, particularly exemplified by Jayavarman VII of Cambodia, is a salient historical case of leadership guided by compassion (*karuṇā*), non-violence (*ahimsā*), and moral restraint (*sīla*). These values, embedded in

inscriptions and temple architectures like the Bayon, symbolize a political theology that unites cosmic order with civic responsibility. Yogic governance, too, offers its ethical template. The *Rājayogi*, as depicted in Patanjali's *Yoga Sūtras*, represents a ruler who governs through self-mastery, inner equanimity, and detachment from material gain. Aurobindo and Ghose (2000) extend this by proposing that yogic consciousness can guide national leadership toward evolutionary progress and ethical social change. These models, deeply spiritual yet inherently political, envision leadership as an extension of inner ecology, rooted in disciplined awareness and guided by a moral compass.

6.2 Contemporary Relevance

Today, the relevance of such models is reflected in experimental governance approaches that prioritize well-being and ethical accountability. Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH), grounded in Buddhist ethical philosophy, is often cited as an institutionalization of inner ecological governance. It incorporates spiritual well-being, environmental conservation, and cultural integrity into state metrics. In India, various state-level wellness policies and the

central promotion of yoga as part of public life signal a parallel orientation toward governance informed by inner balance and public virtue. Authors like Goleman and Kaoun (2019) argue that mindfulness in leadership fosters emotional intelligence, ethical clarity, and civic empathy, making it an antidote to the mechanistic, extractive logic of populist or technocratic regimes. Such insights reaffirm that contemplative traditions are not apolitical or escapist but hold transformative potential for public leadership, especially in societies undergoing ecological and moral crises.

To transition from theory to praxis, governments can adopt culturally rooted ethical governance frameworks. First, policies linking environmental law, civic education, and contemplative practices can foster sustainable leadership from the grassroots up. For example, including Dharma-based modules in civil service training or embedding mindfulness in parliamentary practice can revitalize administrative ethics. Second, ethical audits, evaluative tools that assess public institutions not merely on performance but on moral criteria like compassion, integrity, and social

responsibility, could align governance with inner ecological values.

All in all, the future of governance in the Global South may hinge on reviving its philosophical reservoirs. By re-integrating Buddhist and Yogic models into public ethics, India and Cambodia can offer alternative developmental paradigms that resist instrumental rationality and champion moral sustainability.

VII: Policy and Development Implications

This section offers policy recommendations based on the study's findings, emphasizing the value of Buddhist and Yogic inner ecology, rooted in mindfulness, ethics, and compassion, for advancing sustainable development, especially in the Global South. It focuses on three main areas: education, governance, and international institutions.

- Education should go beyond cognitive learning to include moral and contemplative development. National curricula aligned with SDG 4.7 should incorporate themes like mindfulness, interdependence, and ethical living. Educators need training in culturally adapted Buddhist and Yogic practices such as breath awareness, ethical reflection (Pañca Sīla, Yamas/Niyamas), and environmental

mindfulness, particularly in contexts like India and Cambodia, where such traditions are part of the cultural heritage.

- Governance and environmental leadership should adopt ethical and contemplative frameworks by integrating inner ecology into policy-making, development strategies, and leadership training. Governments can promote public values like compassion and non-violence (Ahimsa) through civic meditation spaces, eco-spiritual rituals, and mindfulness in environmental education to foster ethical and ecological responsibility.

- Regional and global institutions such as ASEAN and the UN should deepen their commitment to culturally grounded sustainability by incorporating Buddhist and Yogic values into their programs. Emphasizing shared values like Dharma and Karuṇā can enhance the effectiveness of initiatives like the ESD Roadmap and SDG 13 by aligning them with moral worldviews that drive long-term behavioural change.

Embedding inner ecology into education, governance, and international policy offers a culturally resonant and ethical pathway to sustainability, helping to create more

compassionate, responsible, and resilient societies.

VIII. Conclusion

8.1 Summary of Findings

This study has shown that Buddhist and Yogic traditions offer rich ethical foundations that can meaningfully inform the concept of inner ecology, a model that unites moral consciousness, contemplative practice, and environmental responsibility. Drawing from classical texts, historical governance models, and current policies in India and Cambodia, the research illustrates how values such as *Sīla* (ethical discipline), *Karuṇā* (compassion), *Ahimsa* (non-violence), and interdependence function not only as spiritual ideals but also as actionable civic and ecological principles. These traditions present a values-based alternative to dominant sustainability discourses, emphasizing restraint, awareness, and spiritual insight. Far from being symbolic remnants of the past, Buddhist and Yogic worldviews remain active systems of knowledge that have the potential to reshape policy, strengthen civic identity, and inspire ecological consciousness. This work also contributes to the decolonization of climate discourse by advancing development models

rooted in indigenous moral and philosophical systems, rather than technocratic or externally imposed frameworks.

8.2 Towards an Ethical-Sustainability Synthesis

The findings call for a fundamental shift from behaviourist and extractive models of governance toward a model grounded in ethical awareness and inner development. In both Buddhist and Yogic traditions, personal transformation, through awareness, restraint, and moral clarity, is seen as essential for sustaining healthy relationships with society and the natural world. This vision of ethical sustainability goes beyond institutional reform; it seeks a cultural reorientation of civic life that embraces silence, empathy, balance, and reverence for life. Governments and institutions can promote such values not through rigid control, but by fostering contemplative education, symbolic leadership, and policies that reward compassion, cooperation, and interdependence. In doing so, states can nurture citizens who are not just compliant, but ethically empowered, capable of becoming stewards of both moral integrity and ecological resilience.

8.3 Future Directions

This study opens several promising paths for future inquiry. One key area is the integration of inner ecology into youth leadership and teacher training programs, especially in post-conflict or transitional societies like Cambodia. These programs could serve as catalysts for building ethical citizenship rooted in indigenous spiritual values. Further empirical research is needed to assess the real-world effects of contemplative curricula on environmental behaviour, civic participation, and emotional well-being. Longitudinal studies using classroom observation, teacher interviews, and student feedback would help evaluate how spiritual ethics shape ecological and civic engagement over time.

Finally, this study presents a transformative vision of development, one that is not only sustainable but also spiritually grounded, ethically coherent, and culturally rooted. Buddhist and Yogic traditions of inner ecology offer powerful tools for reimagining education, governance, and environmental responsibility in a time of planetary crisis. By embracing these frameworks, societies can move toward a future where inner transformation supports outer sustainability, and where compassion and mindfulness

become the foundations of policy and progress.

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